

Allergy Consultants, P.A.

Specialists in Pediatric and Adult Allergy, Asthma, and Sinus Disease

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HIVES

Your diagnosis is hives – the medical word is URTICARIA.

The three most important things you should know:

1. **Hives are very common** – approximately one out of three persons will develop hives in a lifetime. Women have hives more frequently than men so there can be hormonal influences. This office sees usually 3-6 cases of hives every day.
2. Although we know you were referred here by your physician because he is very concerned about your hives, and we know that you are here because you are very concerned about your hives, and for sure, we will take your hives seriously, in the scheme of a medical lifetime, **hives are not considered to be a serious disease!**
3. Some of our patients have had hives for a time prior to their appointment, and it seems like they will never go away, with only very rare exceptions, **hives are temporary!**
 - In acute hives, most cases resolve in “days”.
 - 50% of chronic hives resolve in 3-12 months
 - 20% of chronic hives resolve in 12-36 months
 - 20% of chronic hives resolve in 36-60 months
 - 1.5% of chronic hives can persist for years.

No matter the duration, we will stay with you until your hives disappear, and keep you comfortable during that time.

The Allergist is the appropriate physician who deals with hives. This does not mean that Allergy is always the cause of hives. We will be detectives in trying to find a cause, but truly, **most cases of chronic hives do not have an identifiable cause**, but result from a “twitchy Mast Cell”, that releases excess histamine. This is called **Chronic Idiopathic Urticaria**.

Possible causes of hives:

1. Viral infection: Just a mild cold can trigger the mast cell to cause the hives. Then, the histamine can remain high for a time.
2. Allergy: This can be a food or a medication or a sting. Most allergic hives come within 10 minutes of the exposure, and are gone within hours. Allergy tests are not as important as history to make this diagnosis, and tests are done only for confirmation.
3. Disease: This is quite rare, but in selected patients, we will order some screening blood tests to rule/out disease. **In most patients, this is not necessary and only adds to the expense.**
4. Idiopathic – this is the most common cause of chronic hives, and can be on an “auto-immune” basis; that is, something changed inside your body to make your mast cell “twitchy” and it then releases excess histamine.

Aggravating factors

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Although not the cause of hives, there can be aggravating factors. You can have some control over them.

1. Anything that dilates your blood vessels – hot showers and baths, sweating, hot spicy foods, exertion.
2. Scratching, pressure, especially from elastic, belts, bra straps.
3. In some patients – aspirin and other NSAID's (Motrin, Advil, ibuprophen,)
4. Hormonal influences, especially in women.
5. Stress – considered an aggravating factor and **not** a cause.

TREATMENT

We can keep your hives controlled. The cause is excess histamine, and the **treatment is anti-histamines**. This is individualized, depending on severity, age, underlying conditions.

Many of our patients come to us after a course, or many courses of steroids. Steroids are effective for hives, but we use them only in very rare circumstances. The steroids if used repeatedly can have severe side effects (weight gain, mood disturbances, electrolyte imbalance, osteoporosis, ulcer, hypertension, glaucoma, cataract, etc.) On balance, you should not subject your body to these very significant side effects, for a condition that is not considered serious, and that can usually be controlled with safe medications.

It is important for you to realize that the anti-histamines work by preventing hives, and are much less effective as an “as needed” treatment. For most of our patients, we advise daily treatment until we are sure the hives are gone. This may take time.

The various antihistamines and their order of potency and side effects:

- Benadryl Potency 1
Our least favorite – only lasts 4 hours, causes drowsiness (if driving, reflexes similar to one legally drunk)
- Claritin, Allegra Potency 2-3
- Zyrtec, Hydroxyzine 25 Potency 88
- Doxepin 25 Potency 779

We frequently will suggest two different antihistamines. It is important to not let your skin get too dry. We suggest regular use of a moisturizer, especially after shower or bath.

Remember, we will stay with you until your hives have resolved!